

EXETER-WEST GREENWICH July 28, 2009

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

MINUTES

The Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District School Committee held a special meeting titled Senior Project Workshop on this date at 6:30 p.m. in the Exeter-West Greenwich Jr. – Sr. High School Library. Members present were Teri Cicero, Vice Chairperson; Valerie Zuercher; Mark Rafanelli, Robert Bollengier, and Mary Walsh. Susan DeSack, Chairperson; Gregory Coutcher, Clerk were absent. Superintendent Thomas J. Geismar and Director of Administration Robert V. Ross were present.

ORDER – Vice Chair Cicero called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

**School Improvement Team/Sr. Project Design Team/Student(s)
Presentation -**

Superintendent Geismar opened the meeting stating the workshop was the result of school committee action taken at a previous meeting.

Kim Bolton a parent and a member of the senior high school SIT gave the opening remarks on behalf of the parents and students. The opening remarks included the recognition of the hard work Principal Boulé, her administrative team and the teachers have put into making

senior project successful. There was also the point that while the sr. project is mandated, there remains room for improving the process for students and parents to navigate the sr. project requirement. Ms. Bolton then turned the presentation over to Mary Sommer.

Mrs. Sommer began by giving a background of her work on the senior high SIT, as well as her experience as a parent of a senior high student who went through the sr. project process. She then began a twelve-page MS PowerPoint presentation that addressed the concerns and suggestions for improving the sr. project requirement. Parents and students gave first hand testimony of their experience of dealing with various aspects of the senior project process. This portion of the workshop lasted one hour and forty-five minutes during which no commentary from the school committee, administration, teachers or the audience took place.

Notable concerns included the following:

1) Senior Year “Front-loaded”

- o Sr. Project is too encompassing**
- o Some of the detail requirements are superfluous**
- o Balancing course work, arts, sports, work, sr. project and college applications creates high stress and anxiety.**

2) Mentors

- o Students having to secure a mentor**
- o The lack of no BCI requirements for mentors**
- o The fact that teachers can’t serve as mentors**

- o Lack of mentor outreach concerning time and costs of the endeavor
- 3) Senior Seminar
 - o There is inconsistencies in the delivery of content
 - o A need to increase one-on-one time with students
- 4) Senior Project as a make or break graduation requirement
 - o Change weight value of the 8-10 minute oral presentation
 - o All components of the senior project should be weighted equally
- 5) Disconnect between college
 - o Sr. Project is not considered as a college admission criteria
 - o Students forego AP and honors classes to lighten work load in order to give Sr. Project the time necessary
 - o Senior Seminar classes conflict with scheduling of classes that might help a student's chance for college acceptance.
- 6) Benchmark/Portfolio management
 - o The volume of work required is paper intensive
 - o Student work gets lost or misplaced
 - o Redundancy in class work and or benchmark requirement
 - o Need to improve use of electronic storage and tracking

At the conclusion of the parent and student presentation members of the school committee thanked the parents and students for enlightening them with their testimony about the senior project experience.

Superintendent Geismar then introduced Principal Denise Boulé to address some of the concerns raised by the parents and students as

well as to speak of the changes that have evolved in the process since the inception of the senior project requirement. Ms. Boulé spoke extemporaneously, and handed out specific sections of the sr. project handbook that highlighted the requirements for the sr. project, as well as an organization chart showing how sr. project is reviewed. This portion of the workshop lasted forty-five minutes.

Notable comments at this time included the following:

1) History of Senior Project

- o In 2004, EWGRSD chose senior project and end of the year assessment as the methods to demonstrate students are meeting graduation requirements**
- o The benchmarks/comprehensive test and senior project is a commitment to RIDE as part of the EWGRSD Graduation Requirement**

2) Benchmarks

- o The benchmarks are achieved in grades 9-11 and senior project is achieved in grade 12**
- o Benchmarks represent student proficiency, and are a prerequisite to beginning senior project**
- o Benchmark submission and tracking is evolving, with the goal of less paperwork while increasing the use of electronic tracking to improve the student's awareness of requirements that have been met as well as those still needed**

3) Improving mentor selection process

- o The mentor selection process should be reviewed**
- o The current model is used in other districts**
- o BCI could be incorporated into the process**
- o Using teachers as mentors could be reviewed**
- o Hiring a mentor coordinator might help**

4) Senior Seminar

- o Training for senior seminar teachers is improving**
- o The number of teachers teaching senior seminar have been reduced to create consistency among**
- o Students will receive a grade in senior seminar classes**

At the conclusion of Ms. Boulé's presentation, Superintendent Geismar recognized the hard work that Ms. Boulé and her team have put into developing the sr. project. He then complimented her on her the professionalism she has brought to the job and her dedicated service to the students of EWG over the past ten years. In recognition of her achievements, the audience gave Ms. Boulé hearty round of applause and a standing ovation.

Superintendent Geismar then made the school committee aware that he would include the observation and recommendation from this workshop as an item on the next school committee agenda.

ROBERT ROSS
CLERK